

NEWS

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Union City Bodega Owner Sentenced to 50 Months for Role in Prostitution Ring Involving Smuggled Mexican Females

(More)

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NEWARK – A Union City bodega owner was sentenced to 50 months in prison today for illegally transporting more than \$1 million to Mexico over a four-year period, money which in significant part represented the earnings of Mexican women who had been smuggled into the United States and put to work as prostitutes, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Jose Luis Notario, 52, of Union City, was also ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine by U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas. He remains in custody, where he has been since his arrest in May 2006.

Notario pleaded guilty in federal court in Newark on June 15, 2007, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Leslie F. Schwartz. Notario pleaded guilty to a three-count Information charging him with the operation of an illegal money transmitting business, bulk-cash smuggling, and harboring of illegal aliens.

Notario admitted at his plea hearing that at least as early as about January 2002 through about April 2006 he had operated an illegal money transmitting business from Mi Pequeno Rincon de Mexico, a bodega owned by him and located at 4308 New York Avenue in Union City. Notario further admitted to having made more than two hundred round trip flights between the United States and Mexico during which he transported money for a four-percent fee.

Notario also admitted that he had conversations in March and May 2005 with a cooperating witness during which he agreed to transport \$5,000 and \$15,000, respectively to individuals in Mexico. He further admitted that in June 2005, he had falsely told Customs inspectors at Newark Liberty International Airport that he was in possession of \$4,000 in currency. A subsequent search of his luggage, however, revealed an additional \$14,100 divided into 12 envelopes with the names of the intended recipients.

Notario also admitted that he had harbored more than six but less than 24 individuals whom he knew to be illegal aliens at a building owned by him at 318 42nd Street in Union City.

The charges against Notario were part of an investigation into a large-scale smuggling and trafficking ring operating out of Union City. During the course of the investigation, it was determined that there were a number of families in the vicinity of San Miguel Tenancingo, Mexico, who smuggled Mexican females into the United States where they were placed to work as prostitutes. The smuggled women ranged in age from 17 to their mid-twenties.

Once the females were smuggled into the United States, many of them were transported to the east coast, primarily to Union City and Queens, New York. Many of the females

temporarily resided in “safe houses” with their traffickers or pimps. From there, the females were sent by passenger van to brothels in Maryland, Virginia and other east coast locations.

Typically the females worked as prostitutes at a single location for one week, generally from Monday to Sunday. They were then transported, usually on Sunday evenings, back to the “safe houses” maintained by their traffickers, where they replenished their supplies for the upcoming week. The women routinely turned over their earnings to their traffickers who sent the money back to the trafficker’s families in Mexico.

As Judge Irenas stated at sentencing, Notario’s building at 318 42nd Street in Union City was the “epicenter” of the prostitution operation. Through the use of surveillances and trash retrievals at that address, it was revealed that the location was used as a “safe house” for numerous young Mexican females working as prostitutes, none of whom had legal status in this country.

Other individuals who have been arrested and charged during the course of the investigation include:

- Humberto Saucedo Notario, Jose Luis Notario’s nephew, who was sentenced by the U.S. District Judge Susan D. Wigenton on Aug. 15 to 18 months’ imprisonment, for harboring an illegal alien for the purpose of prostitution;
- Raymondo Calderon Notario, Jose Luis Notario’s nephew, who was also sentenced by Judge Wigenton on Aug. 15 to 21 months’ imprisonment, for harboring three separate illegal aliens for the purpose of prostitution;
- Adrian Calderon Notario, Jose Luis Notario’s nephew, who was sentenced by Judge Wigenton on July 24 to time served from the time of his arrest in May 2006 for harboring an illegal alien at 2613 Kennedy Boulevard, Union City, for the purpose of prostitution;
- Aurelio Notario Guzman, who was sentenced by Judge Wigenton on June 12, to time served from the time of his arrest in May 2006, for smuggling an alien into the United States;
- Domingo Sanchez Ramirez, who was sentenced on Jan. 22, by U.S. District Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise to 27 months’ imprisonment for transporting illegal aliens within the United States, for the purpose of commercial advantage and private financial gain;
- Oscar Quintero Ramirez, 34, who was sentenced by Judge Debevoise on Sept. 24 to 27 months’ imprisonment, for transporting illegal aliens within the United States for the purpose of commercial advantage and private financial gain;

- Herminio Flores Santiago, who was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Faith S. Hochberg on July 23, 2007 to 59 month's imprisonment and \$20,900 in restitution, for conspiring to recruit a Mexican female under the age of 18 years to come to the United States to engage in a commercial sex act;
- Ismael Flores Santiago, who was sentenced by Judge Hochberg on July 23, 2007 to 16 months' imprisonment, for harboring illegal aliens for the purposes of prostitution at 521 40th Street, 2nd Floor, Union City;
- Alicia Cuahutle Flores, who was sentenced by the Judge Hochberg on July 23, 2007 to time served from the time of her arrest in May 2006, for transporting an illegal alien within the United States;
- Jose Ignacio Notario, defendant Jose Luis Notario's brother, who was sentenced by Judge Hochberg on Nov. 8, 2006, to time served from the time of his arrest in May 2006, for operating an illegal money transmitting business;
- Juan Rojas Velazquez, 45, who was sentenced by the U.S. District Judge Katherine H. Hayden on July 11 to 15 months' imprisonment, for harboring an illegal alien for the purposes of prostitution at 118 42nd Street, Union City;
- Silvestre Cordero Mendez, 39, who was sentenced by Judge Hayden on July 11 to 15 month's imprisonment, for harboring an illegal alien for the purposes of prostitution at 118 42nd Street, Union City;

Christie credited Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Kyle Hutchins, for their work in developing the case. Christie also thanked the United States Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Gordon S. Heddell, and the New Jersey State Police, for their assistance in bringing the defendants to justice.

The government was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shana W. Chen, of the Criminal Division's Public Protection Unit, and Leslie F. Schwartz, of the Criminal Division's Strike Force Unit, in Newark.

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Defense Attorney: Genesis Peduto, for Jose Luis Notario

